

# MANAGEMENT OF AN ASSISTANT MINISTER AND OTHER STAFF

## SOME GUIDELINES

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It is encouraging that recently some Free Churches have grown numerically. While all churches rely on the goodwill of unpaid volunteers, there are situations where staff may be employed. This may be an Assistant Minister or a church secretary, or some specialist worker. In these situations, Ministers can find it challenging to manage staff as they may have little training and experience in this area.

This paper addresses the method and practice of the management of staff by a Minister.

## MANAGING OF AN ASSISTANT MINISTER

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Rev Derek Lamont (St Columba's, Edinburgh) makes the following informal, and more pastoral, suggestions from his experience:

**PARTNERSHIP** I have treated each Assistantship like a partnership, and given plenty of preaching opportunities. It is a challenge to do so, because ministers tend to like the control and the popularity preaching can give. However, it is good for the senior minister to sit under the Word, and good for the congregation to see that he is willing to share the pulpit. I do not think that making Assistants simply do youth work or the things the minister does not like doing is the best use of the position.

**AUTHORITY** Even though there is a partnership, the Minister is still in the position of authority and often, line management. He should meet up regularly, say weekly, to advise, mentor and critique the Assistant's preaching, and general work standard.

**ACCOUNTABILITY** The minister should keep the Assistant accountable in things like time management, and other practical ministry matters. But

also, the minister should be a pastor to him, asking searching and personal questions about the Spiritual life and walk of the Assistant.

**INVOLVEMENT** It is important to involve the Assistant in planning and decision making: Explain to him why things are being done in a particular way. Be open in talking with him, and teach him informally through the different activities of ministry. Let him experience really good communication lines with you, and also between you and the leadership and congregation, so that he will use these skills in his future ministry.

**BEGINNING** Initially, guide the Assistant in pastoral work, and ask him to visit who you want him to visit, not simply leaving him to contact the people he would like to visit.

**INCREASED RESPONSIBILITY** In time, give the Assistant areas of responsibility that he can develop himself and resist engaging in micromanagement. Give him a specific area of ministry to develop from its genesis through to its launch.

Assistant Ministers can be young and inexperienced, and will make mistakes. But their confidence and ability will grow, if the Minister is relaxed about such mistakes: (within reason!) Make sure that there is time for reflection over tasks done: what can be done better, what was good, what was weak and so on.

**TIME OFF** The Assistant should be given a good amount of time off. The ministry is pressurised and he should be educated to spend time with his family and not try and be a martyr for the sake of being busy, or trying to be popular. It is important for each of us to be aware of our limitations, know stress signs and respond accordingly. It is also vital for the sake of wife and family that these times are adhered to religiously.

**FAMILY** If the Assistant has wife (and possibly a young family) please be aware of their needs, and consider setting aside someone in the congregation to mentor, support her as she copes with the transition and the demands of her husband often working long and unsociable hours.

**OUTSIDE ENGAGEMENTS** The Minister should be possessive about his Assistant's time schedule. This means managing his preaching away from the home congregation, including invitations to speak at midweek meetings. It is good to gain wider experience but not at the expense of his local training. In all of these things, wisdom and balance is required.

Also aim to keep the Assistant off wider Church or denominational work for at least the first two years.

**TRAINING AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT** Give the Assistant some broad reading material. And encourage him to go to one conference a year, paid for by the Deacons' Court. It is better that this conference is not a Free Church one. Set aside time for ongoing training which may involve written material, reading or practical tasks. Do not re-invent the wheel; there is a huge amount of useful training material for life in ministry.

Rev Neil MacMillan (Cornerstone, Edinburgh) has more resource materials in this area which might be of help.

## MANAGING OF OTHER STAFF

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The following points are given by Charles Anderson, Church Manager (Smithton-Culloden Free Church). They concern management of church staff by Ministers.

**SHARED VISION** Agreement on the big picture is crucial for all staff.

**JOB DESCRIPTION** Think through exactly what is the function of the worker. Their role should be clear and challenging. Work on a few projects together and this will develop team relationships.

**CONTRACTUAL REQUIREMENTS** Issues such as contracts of employment, health and safety and pay, need to be addressed. Help with these can be found on the Free Church website under Ministry Matters, and from the Church's Finance and Compliance Officers.

**RESPONSIBILITY** Put the worker in charge of certain aspects of the work. Avoid the temptation to make them number two in every area in which the Minister operates. Provide specific responsibilities with defined boundaries where they are in charge. These can grow with time. Do not micromanage their activities but rather have a general oversight of their work. If you take back jobs to yourself because they are not doing it the way you want, their confidence is undermined.

**GOOD MANAGEMENT** This means, for instance, is there a stated plan which includes aims, procedures and objectives? Is the Minister's attitude a positive one which encourages development and growth? Encouragement is needed but also at times correction, so that skills can be improved

**REGULAR MEETINGS** Meet regularly, and in the case of an Assistant this will be more frequent than with other staff. Part of the meeting will be to review work already done, but often it will be yourselves as partners discussing the way forward. It is good to focus on planning, to remember pastoral needs and to see the big picture. There should be the opportunity to discuss problems or disappointments.

**PASTORAL CONCERN** Pray for the staff regularly and affirm them positively to the congregation.

**CONFIDENCE** Where appropriate, place them in charge when you are away. If the relationship is working well, this should not be a problem. Let them know what decisions they can take and assure them of your support. Have confidence in them, and so be able to relax and enjoy your time away.

**OBJECTIVES** Draw up quarterly objectives for each staff member. This may include a reading plan or further studies to develop their area of expertise.

## LINE MANAGEMENT OPTIONS

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Line management options include:

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**THE MINISTER IN CHARGE** He will take on the responsibility to manage all the staff. This might be too much however if there is a team of two or more. And it can be problematic if the Minister has little aptitude or experience in this kind of leadership.

**THE MINISTER JUST MANAGES PASTORAL STAFF** The Minister would manage the Assistant Minister, and or pastoral staff and leave the

administrative and support staff to someone else, such as a Church Administrator.

**MEMBER OF THE KIRK SESSION OR DEACONS' COURT ACTING AS MANAGER** It may be preferable for an office-bearer who has the necessary skills, to manage a staff member. In this situation, it would be important that he is in tune with the Minister's thinking.

## IN SUMMARY

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Individual members of the team can be developed through the mnemonic AID:

- **AIMS** Giving direction by providing personal aims and targets
- **INVOLVEMENT** Give encouragement and guidance through regular one-to-one meetings
- **DEVELOPMENT** Skills can be strengthened through training, experiencing responsibilities and providing time for review and appraisal.

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